

How I Made Partner: 'I Can Wrangle, Navigate, and Negotiate,' Says Anu Yerramalli of Latham & Watkins

By Tasha Norman

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Practice area: Restructuring and special situations.

Law school and year of graduation: I graduated from St. John's University School of Law in 2007.

How long have you been at the firm? A little more than two years. I started at Latham in January 2020. I was counsel from January 2020 until March 2022, when I was promoted to partner.

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? I spent 10 years at Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel — seven years as an associate and three as special counsel. I left in November 2019.

What was the most rewarding aspect in becoming a partner? By far, the overwhelming outpouring of support. Restructuring professionals are a very tight-knit community, and we take time to celebrate those who succeed and achieve their goals. Making partner was an achievement I worked toward for a long time. When my promotion was announced, people I had not worked with or spoken to in years reached out to offer their congratulations. I felt reaffirmed by having so many folks

acknowledge this accomplishment and recognize the amount of work I put in to get to this point. Especially after the last few years of working from home, I valued the opportunities to reconnect with colleagues in person.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you a partner? I've been at Latham a relatively short time, but I've worked hard to support the growth and maturity of the restructuring practice. The Mallinckrodt matter in particular is the most complex the group has seen in some time, and I have co-lead that matter basically soup to nuts for almost two years with the support of an exceptional team. I was fortunate that my new group entrusted me with such an important case and gave me the opportunity to show what I was capable of. And my broader network helps too. Having practiced in New York for over 10 years now, I've been able to build what I hope is a great reputation and make contacts that can help the restructuring group achieve its objectives, especially because we tend to see the same players over and over again.

I'd also say that my personality played a role. I can wrangle, navigate, and negotiate with a lot of parties with



Courtesy Photo

Anu Yerramalli

disparate interests and push everyone to consensus. Being commercial, solution-focused, and delivering results positioned me well. My ability to manage a large team and help more junior lawyers develop, as I did in Mallinckrodt, helped too.

Describe how you feel about your career now that you've made partner? There's a sense that I've achieved this major life accomplishment, and I'm proud to be part of a growing and increasingly diverse group of partners. I also view this as a position where I can give back. Since coming to Latham, I have taken on mentorship roles for our associates, recently with the Fourth Year Academy. I'm the local co-leader of the Women Enriching Business Committee. Now that I'm a partner, I can use my role to train up the next

class of great restructuring lawyers, as well as advocate on their behalf as they approach career milestones like I just did.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your leadership role? While I have been fortunate to have long-time mentors that are judges and practitioners, maybe this will sound cliché, but my mother has been my biggest inspiration and champion. It's a softer influence than, say, a formal mentor in the practice, but she exemplifies total dedication to her work — she's a doctor — and her example demonstrated how a strong work ethic pays dividends down the line. Even from a young age, I saw how her commitment empowered her, and that served as a model for me in my own career.

What's the best piece of advice you could give an associate who wants to make partner? First and foremost, find ways to lead and make a name for yourself inside and outside your own firm. Building a reputation is so critical because your reputation is your greatest currency with colleagues, clients, and opposing counsel. Leadership can take different forms; you can lead a case or a deal, or an aspect of it, or take on a leadership role on a firm committee or at an industry organization. Whatever it is, find the opportunities that will help build your reputation both substantively and as a member of the community.

In a practice like restructuring, leading does entail raising your hand and

asking for those chances. Make the most of the opportunities that present themselves, and prove your merit. Your career is your own, so you have to put yourself in the driver's seat.

If you had a chance to advise or mentor your younger self, what advice would you give? At every stage, I'd tell myself to take stock of where I am in my career and ask: Am I doing what I want to be doing in this moment? Can I get to where I want to be in five years? If my younger self answered *no*, I'd say take chances. Whether that's the little opportunities, like asking for assignments that will help me stretch my abilities, or the larger options, like transitioning to a different company or different type of industry.

What initiatives are you working on at the firm that you are most proud of? The same week I made partner, I was named to the firm's Best Supervisors List. It was truly touching that the junior attorneys on my team value my leadership and management style, and felt they were benefiting from our relationship. I do my best to create a collaborative, inclusive environment, especially for the next generation of talent. I find that it's a much more rewarding experience to make our work interactive, instead of just assigning it in a vacuum. Having our junior associates actively participate in client and adversary communication is a standard I'm proud to have fostered.



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What is the biggest challenge facing leaders today? By far, the primary question leaders face coming out of the pandemic is how to adapt to a hybrid environment. The industry still has to shift and respond to new issues that arise, ranging from the logistical (e.g., office space planning) to more fundamental issues like training, morale and retention. The needs of a team, both from a senior and a junior perspective, have radically changed in the last couple of years, and we've all had to learn by experience. Coming up with that fail-safe model, which differs by group and personality, requires constant attention.

The other aspect we have to keep front of mind is how the legal practice itself has changed. Ten years ago, making partner was the primary definition of success for a lawyer. Now junior lawyers have a much broader idea of what a successful legal career can look like, whether that's making partner, or going in-house, or serving in government. So there's definitely a challenge for firms in substantively training associates where they can position themselves to do the work they want to do, while also building and maintaining a long-term relationship with them so that they view themselves as the future of the practice.